

JP Hi, this is Tour Chief Jim, and today we're talking with Eleanor McMahon (E.M), she is a former Member of Parliament in Ontario, one term, 4 years, you were the press secretary to the Prime Minister, which P.M.?

EM: Yes, I was (press secretary) to Prime Minister Jean Chretien.

JP And for how long

EM Well, I worked on Parliament Hill so I was a legislative aide. So our Parliament Hill is like your Capitol Hill in Washington, and I was a legislative aide for 8 years. So I started working for a local member of parliament, I grew up in Windsor, Ontario, which is kind of fun, you know Michigan is close to my heart in many ways. Herb Gray was the Member of Parliament from Windsor, so I got a job in his office on the hill, which was my local connection...

JP What year was that?

EM So I started in 1985, and I was on the hill between 85 and 93. Long time, and a very interesting time for me. It was good, I learned a lot, and it sort of set the foundation for my career and allowed me to...it was extraordinary, for a pretty young person I had a rolodex that was pretty impressive. That's what you get from working in those jobs. They're exciting and interesting, and they teach you a lot about how to think quickly. I lived in France, and I'm bilingual which is important in Canada because we have two official languages. The PM that I worked for was from Quebec, and to succeed in Ottawa and on the hill you really need to speak French. It's helpful.

JP So let's go back, you grew up in Windsor, as the youngest of 7 (children) in an Irish Catholic family...did you have a bicycle as a child?

EM I did, I bike everywhere, and I think we all see it now, I see it with my nieces and nephews, their parents just give them rides everywhere. When they were younger, my brother and his wife would go out of town, they have 4 children (for me to babysit), the kids would say "take me here" or "take me there" and I'd say "what's that in the garage with two wheels on it?" Or "Geeze, maybe you should get on your feet and walk", or "how about the bus". I think we've gotten out of that, and it's hurt the resiliency of our kids. It's (chauffeured rides) robbed them of the opportunity to create health habits for life, and a sense of independence, which is what a bike gave me.

JP And that's what growing up is all about!

EM Yes, 100%. My mother would, I was telling this story to somebody today, and god bless her, I've told this story (many times) and she laughs. But when I was in high school I had a bicycle, there was absolutely no way I was going to get access to a car with 6 siblings. And in any case, by the time I was in college I was the only one left at

home. My brothers had moved out, except for one still at home, but really there was no way I was getting access to a car...

JP You had a drivers' license but no car...

EM Correct, and then when I moved to Ottawa I survived on (public) transit and riding my bike, and this was in graduate school, and then I started working. I didn't have a car, I didn't have access to a car. I think that drove (my) transportation behaviors in different ways. Now, in an interesting twist of fate, most of my nieces and nephews-some are car dependent- but most of them don't have a car. That's in keeping with the broader trends that we see, right? 40% fewer young people are driving now, and that's a good thing. As someone who grew up in the Canadian Motor City, my dad worked at Chrysler, I worked at Chrysler in the summers as I got older, which helped pay for my education and my year abroad in France, I was paying for that, my parents weren't paying, that's for sure! So, I grew up in a very independent time, where having a bicycle was freedom, and allowed me to explore parts of the city that I hadn't before. And it took me to places, too. Mom would say "are you going to Lisa's house?" Lisa was this friend I had in high school that my mom wasn't particularly fond of. She wasn't a bad kid, just...

JP...a little busier than most!

EM ...busier than most! And so mom would say "are you going to Lisa's house" and I would kind of fib (laughing) and say NO, but I would get on my bike and I was gone! I never did anything inappropriate, it's just that concept of freedom...

JP...You're a teenager!

EM Yes, being a teenager! And if that's the worst thing that we did as kids, for heaven's sake, that's a far cry from really bad things. But the bike was freedom, and I've ridden bikes all my life.

JP So, you went to university, in the 1980s you started in (background) in government, you were married at some point here...

EM So I got married late in life actually, after I left the hill, I did a variety of things in the private sector, and in the non-profit sector, and public sector, and I've had a great career. I was a vice president by the time I was in my late 20s, really focused on my career, well networked. Because I worked for the Prime Minister I had a pretty enviable Rolodex for a young person. I was really focused on my career, so I didn't meet my husband until I was 37. I got married when I was 39, which is older than most people.

JP And he unfortunately was a cyclist and struck and killed by a driver who was unlicensed at the time...

EM Yes, he, actually he was licensed, and the funny thing about it, and it's a nuance, but he got his license back, so he's been convicted of driving under suspension 5 times, driving without a license 4 times. He had \$15,000 in unpaid fines. Two months after he killed my husband he hit someone else, so you may say that he had a pattern of

disregard. He had got his license back, because with the Ministry of Transportation in Ontario, those unpaid fines that he racked up, someone said to me once, well, he got those suspensions because he hadn't paid his fines. That's not the point. The point is that he was driving constantly under suspension, which is an offense. And it means that you're uninsured. If he hit someone, which he did, in our case, you don't have insurance. So that's a pattern of risk that's not in keeping with what we expect motorists to have. Driving is a privilege and not a right, and I think a lot of the work that we did around road safety was to send a really strong societal message that cycling & cyclists matter; and that you had to pay attention when you're behind the wheel.

JP So this morning (in your talk) you said "suspended license drivers are risk takers." Go on a bit...

EM I think this is what I've learned in my research and in my work. And because I'm part of the police family, I had access to police officers, and I lived in the police culture because I was married to one. And what Police officers will tell you, if you pull someone over, and this was Greg's constant lament, he would come home from a shift and say "oh, my gosh, I pulled over that guy again", and I would say "what guy" Often those were repeat offenders. Previous to Greg's death there was no encompassing charge for repeat offenders, people who repeatedly drove under suspension. And that (Greg's Law) was a way for us to memorialize him, to allow officers they needed to really clamp down and get really serious. Previous to that, M.D., that's the guy who killed my husband, was a perfect example of someone who just drove with impunity and had little regard for the fact that "uh-oh, I'm under suspension, I really shouldn't be driving". In theory you could keep driving and keep driving and keep driving, and really all you would do is continue to rack up fines. Whereas, when Greg's Law came along, after Greg was killed and we decided to memorialize him and make this legal change, Ontario has the busiest roads in Canada. The Highway 401 which goes through Toronto is the busiest road in North America. Five hundred thousand cars a day go over a stretch of highway that goes across the top of Toronto.

JP It's miserable driving there...

EM It's miserable driving and it's busy driving, and Greg policed those roads, so you know, when you think about the fact that there's about half a million people in Ontario who are under suspension at any given time, out of a population of 14 million people

JP 14 million people, how many of those are drivers?

EM Yes well that's a statistic that I've got somewhere in my memory banks, but it's not coming to mind.

JP Is it more than half? It might be two-thirds.

EM It might be two thirds...

JP So let's call it 10 million, and 500,000 are under suspension. That's a huge (percentage) number...

EM Yes, and three quarters of those people are continuing to drive. And again those are uninsured drivers, and if they hit someone it's consequential, but just to have the profile of someone who—most people, if you get a notice in the mail that you're under suspension, you'd stop driving. Most law abiding people would stop driving. They would say uh-oh, I'd better clear that up, cause I really can't drive, what if I get caught? Oh my heavens, or, what if I hit someone? Or...it's just wrong. And so, unfortunately in his case that wasn't compelling enough and he kept driving. And to make things worse, he was a commercial driver! So he was driving for a living.

JP So at some point he had (an enhanced license), for air brakes, or for so many axles...

EM He was driving a 5 ton truck, yeah, it was a large vehicle that he was driving every day, for a living. So, I mean, people who drive for a living, we should hold them to a different standard. He didn't meet that standard. So, we had two trials, he pled guilty and he didn't like his sentence so he appealed. His sentence was meager but he didn't like it, so he appealed. And the justice of the peace in the first trial was not...didn't execute his responsibilities very well, and so he was granted an appeal. So we went through two trials, two times in the courtroom, two trips to do a victim impact statement, two times where we went through again and again what happened, so it was a very difficult time. It was on the way home from the second trial, and he knew that he was going to be convicted- he made a deal with the Crown, and his sentence was reduced. They (the prosecutor) had been calling for jail... So, what we did with that, my brother and I, just reasoned that this tragic loss of someone that we loved and cared about, we needed to try and bring some sense to that senseless act. And really having gone through it, and it tore us apart, we really wanted other families not to have to go through that, too. We had already been talking, but now that the trial was behind us, and my brother was just astounded that someone could drive with that kind of record. So we resolved that we would do something. So I got to work doing a business case, and again my political training came in handy because I was able to make an appeal, and I didn't meet with the premier even though I'd been on his leadership campaign, I didn't want to get this done because I had special privileges, I wanted to make the case and get it done because it was the right thing to do. And so, I worked with the chief of Ontario Provincial Police, a commissioner who said "what can I do" We met after the trial. I said I want you to do these following things; I want you to talk to the public service, I want you to make the case for me inside government, and I gave him the business case, all the research I'd done, I had a power point (presentation) ready, we went through it. I gave it to him and said this is why we need this (law), and he agreed. He said OK, we're going to do this together, and so we did! That was extraordinarily helpful. It was some tough slogging, and pushing uphill, but Greg's Law passed in 2009, and that demonstrated that we could do something effective. In the same time, and in

parallel, we started working on really building the case for a cycling organization, which again I hadn't set out to do, but there was nothing (for organization), so I set out to build it. I spent a year and a half looking at the business case, looking at whether or not the organization would work, whether or not people would support it, whether or not there was a substantial or sustainable reason for it to exist in the first place. But also that people would support it. I didn't want to...I'm a very practical person, and I didn't want to build something and go the trouble only to have it disappear in obscurity. I wanted it to be foundational and to be strong. It's the same reason why ironically I left in 2013. Greg died in 2006, I spent about 18 months traveling internationally, spent a lot of time in the U.S., made a lot of friends and contacts in the leadership of the cycling world. Went to Europe, Velo City Conferences, talked to legislators, talked to law enforcement, talked to advocates, talked to city builders. I looked at what we could do in Ontario, and what we weren't doing, looked at the art of the possible, decided to really look into my rolodex and my political contacts, and started to talk to them, started mobilizing. I started looking at all the levers, I'm a low-hanging-fruit type of person, really approached it from that perspective. I started raising money, went to foundations, wrote grants, got a really good strategic plan in place, put a board in place that was really effective. One not of cycling people. Traditionally a lot of non-profits put together boards, and with no disrespect, I guess because I had professional experience with boards, and I'd been around, I knew what I needed...

JP You needed depth...

EM I needed depth, I needed credibility, I needed people who were actually going to do things, and people that could bring stuff to the table, and execute. So we put the board together, we started the organization in 2008, we set a fairly good strategic plan, we raised money, hired staff because I couldn't continue to do this on my own. We did a research paper for the Ontario government, spent about a year and a half putting that together, had our first bike summit where we put stakeholders together. Wrote the research paper in 2010, met with the transportation minister because at the time, cycling in Canada is not-unlike the US- a national thing, it's very much a provincial responsibility. Roads are governed by provincial governments in Canada, there are 13 of those, three territories and 10 provinces, and the national government from a transportation point of view is trains & planes, that's it. Everything else falls to the provinces, so it's clearly a provincial endeavor, and as I started to navigate policy, politics, partnerships, and looking at all of the possibilities inherent in building a cycling organization, we got going. So in 2010 the research paper that made the case for cycling strategy in Ontario, we needed it across government, we needed it to break down the silos, so we made the case to government. The transportation minister in 2010, Cathleen Wynn, who later became the premier of Ontario, and who asked me to run and be part of her government-we established a relationship, she and I, early on. She'd lived in Holland, she'd cycle, she saw the value, so it was perfect. She saw this immediately. So then I began to continue the lobbying, I went to England in 2011, before the 2012 Olympics, with Andy Clark, who was the CEO of the League (of

American Wheelmen). I brought back really good best practices from around the world, I brought back a great one from England, the All-party cycling caucus, which is part of the-we are a parliamentary system in Canada, much different that the United States, so are the Brits, they had this really fabulous all party cycling caucus which took the politics right out of cycling. And we'd seen too much of that in Ontario with the mayor of Toronto who said "There's a war on the car"...

JP You made the statement this morning that bicycling is not political...10:21

EM Never! Never should be political. Not only because it brings so much value to society on every single level, but also because it is people's lives that we're talking about, it's public safety, and that should never be a partisan issue. What had been happening in Canada and in the US to a certain degree was there was a perception that cyclists represented a certain cohort of the population, and that is wedge politics, and I just called it out immediately. I guess it was my political experience that helped me to do that, but I also said that the biggest weapon that we can use against that, because I was adamant about it, was that we could do polling and demonstrate that there was broad public support for cycling, to get beyond the anecdotal. People who practice that wedge politics, assumed that people could be misled by ...facts matter, so we went out and did polling, we did it every year at our bike summits. It became a media story, it was anchored, and it gave us some gravitas, and demonstrated to people that we were an evidence based organization. This really set us apart as a professional organization that was prepared to invest in making the case for what we wanted. As I would say to advocates which was a big part of our deal, obviously we did advocacy and legislative work, but we also built capacity within the cycling movement. I worked really hard to up the game, I've always said to cyclists "bring your A game, you can't afford the B game". You're up against people who are highly skilled, very sophisticated, and I knew that because I'd been one of those people (laughs). I'd been a lobbyist, and I knew what we were up against, and what legislators wanted and needed. To create something from nothing is a significant task. 12:23

JP So, your husband's death in 2006, Greg's Law in 2009, advocacy work from that point forward, and then you were elected to Ontario Parliament in 2014.

EM 2013 we finally got the cycling strategy, by the way, that we worked on for 3 years, that we lobbied for, and that happened after we got a coroners review into cycling deaths which we also got in 2012. And then the premier invited me for lunch in late 2013 and said "I want you to be part of my team". And I had already told my board of directors that I would be leaving the following year, and that we needed a succession plan, because I didn't want to have founders syndrome, I didn't want the organization to be about me. That would have been a mistake both for me professionally and personally, and for the organization, it needed to fly on its' own. And now there's a new executive director, and she's doing great! It's allowed, when I got elected and appointed to cabinet, and the premier asked me to do the cycling file, Share the Road had already established itself as an incredible organization with tremendous credibility among

legislators-we'd done that work already. So by the time I was minister, and I'd already had the ministerial cycling group which grew out of the 2013 creation of the Ontario cycling strategy, The minister at the time, this is well before I was elected, I was still an advocate, I said "we need the cycling strategy done", and he said "why don't you just write it?" That's nice, that's very flattering, but I don't want to write a strategy and present it to government, I want it to grow organically from within government, and it needs to be presented to government by a variety of voices that you care about, not just mine. This is very funny because I ended up being in cabinet, I said to him "you can't go in to cabinet (and I knew this from working for the P.M.) and say 'well this was written by Eleanor McMahon'. It needed to be written by cyclists and advocates, and police officers, and legislative officials and city councilors and mayors, because it had been shaped and formed by many voices. That strategy allowed me then, as minister, 3 years later, to use it as an anchor to continue progress. It allowed Share the Road, starting in 2013, at the Bike Summit every year, to get the government to come and give an accounting and a report card on. We have this strategy, it's a 20-year vision for the province, how are we doing? So it was a check-in every year, and a discipline, that was created, where the government had to be held to account for the progress they were making. So it created a discipline across 12 government ministries whereby people were held accountable, and they knew that bike summit was coming and they better be ready...

JP and this is 12 government ministries? In each of those 12 pieces there are multiple things going on, roads, parks, but who else?

EM If you look at the 5 links of the stools, we separated into 5 areas of activity. Two of those were largely regulatory and had to do with infrastructure and legislation that emanated from the ministry of transportation. Three of the others were the parts that I assumed responsibility for. And I had deal with bike tourism and travel, behavior change, and education and awareness. As a marketer by training, those are the things that appealed to me. So my ministry of Tourism Culture & Sport, which had resident within it the first ever Ontario cycling strategy for tourism, and bring people to Canada, more specifically to Ontario, to get them to ride their bikes. And create tourism revenue, economic development, and jobs in smaller communities. So we'd done the work, and we knew that that was possible. So my ministry officials really seized upon the cycling file to do something really meaningful. And that really mirrored the goals of our government, in term of reducing emissions. So we paid for the cycling infrastructure that we announced, in 2017, it was \$100 million dollars, the most in Canadian History. It was a significant investment, and it came out of the Cap & Trade proceeds. So we had until earlier this year when we lost government, a very robust cap & trade program. We were part of the Western Climate Initiative, along with California and Quebec, we're the largest carbon market in the world. It was creating proceeds because we were selling cap & trade credits on the open market. The proceeds of that were generated to fund and foster sustainable development technologies and so on, and of course cycling-40% of the emissions come from transportation, so it made sense for us to look at a viable

alternative to riding (in) cars. So cycling became an activity that everybody embraced, from the premier on down. And of course because it was resident within those 12 ministries, and each of them had a buy-in, everybody had skin in the game! It was an all of government activity. It wasn't silo'd away in some section of the ministry like it was when I started working with government. You know, nobody wants to be the director of special projects, that's the worst title. There was a division within the Ministry of Transportation called Sustainable Transportation or something, boy oh boy, talk about the worst job in the world. You're sort of silo'd in a culture that doesn't support you. (18:00) That is not what I wanted, I wanted cycling to be embedded as a mode of transportation-a serious one- that garnered attention and that was mandated by infrastructure funding. We had to make it serious and real, and we had to get away from this notion that cycling was a frill or sometime activity. We have 650,000 people in Ontario riding their bikes every day. That's serious, that's a lot of people. There are close to 200,000 (cyclists) in Toronto every day alone. As society changes, and millennials cease to drive and own vehicles, and seek other modes of transportation, it becomes an economic development imperative. If you want to attract the next generation of workers to your city or town, you better be a bicycle friendly community.

JP And as technology changes, as we've seen at the conference with e-scooters and e-bikes, that's going to increase the impetus to not have a car...

EM Well, and someone at the e-bike demo, said "oh my God, those are coming" and I said "we put men on the moon and brought them back again, surely we can figure this out! We're smart people!" This is not brain surgery, people, this is 'how do we want to live, and what kind of cities do we want?' And I look at Detroit, as an opportunity...

JP It is an opportunity, and there's a ton of cycling...

EM... There's a ton of cycling going on in Detroit, and Detroit is becoming revitalized in very organic ways, it's very exciting.

JP So I have two more questions, first did you cycle with your husband?

EM Yes I did. We cycled a lot. When we first met, we took a posting to allow Greg to get promoted, to a very rural part of the province. The Ontario Provincial Police is largely a rural police force. There are large city police forces, big towns have their own, but they (OPP) patrol the highways and small towns. So we moved to Eganville in the Ottawa valley, 1100 people, it was quite a change for both of us. We came from a very urban environment to a very small town. We loved cycling, we did triathlons, and we cycled a lot. We would ride for three hours and not see a car, it was wonderful. And then we moved to Burlington, where Greg was killed, you know, big city, suburb of Toronto, family there. We used to ride, when we first moved there, and Greg was very concerned about my safety, and we had a couple of close calls. Then ironically doesn't he lose his life by a careless, thoughtless individual who pulled out to pass going uphill on a two-lane road. I mean, I don't know who does that. I was able to forgive this man because I had to - and I did - because I didn't want him to occupy my every thought. I didn't want

to be a vengeful person, because that's not who I am. I didn't think that was a healthy route to my happiness. My saving grace was the ability to pour my energy into making a difference in people's lives. And then I went on to be a legislator under the same premise. I don't know why else, and I know this sounds naive, why people go into politics. Our rules are very different in Canada, but nonetheless ...

JP...the pressures are the same...

EM...The pressures are the same. I really don't know, it's a difficult place to be, it's an extraordinary worthy enterprise, it's important. We need to attract good people to public life. I will always be about that, but I've had my turn around the sun, and in 4 years I really accomplished everything I set out to do. I'm extraordinarily grateful for that. I was able to move the cycling agenda along in Ontario in some really important ways, and I'll always be grateful for that.

JP I want to Oberstar. I grew up in Duluth, and he took over the congressional seat from John Blatnik and this would be in the early 70s. At the time we just thought he's this talking head. Fast forward 30 years, and he has a remarkable legacy in transportation. (23:00)

EM Yes, he and I met, at the national bike summit in Washington. I was attracted to him because I heard him speak at Pro Walk-Pro Bike in Seattle in 2008; this was an Andy Clark legacy moment, because Andy had the League in Washington; had opened his rolodex again. Andy knew, we were still friends, (that) I had this legislative background. So, he was putting together a meeting with Congressman Oberstar in his office, and he said 'why don't you come?' Really? I'd love to come, so what a great opportunity! I felt like Forrest Gump, sitting there with all these amazing people, and I was really...listening. I really wanted to use the opportunity to listen, and I was sitting looking around his office, with all the pictures-legislators tend to have a lot of photographs on the walls, especially ones that have been in public life a long time. And I'm looking around his office during the meeting, looking at all these amazing photographs, and I began to understand -and I knew- that his wife had died of breast cancer, and that had really driven his desire to raise his kids in a really healthy way, and he was concerned about public health issues, and you know, that really was a very personal -ah- he was driven by personal tragedy. And since I had lost my husband, I think that really connected the two of us. So during the meeting I hadn't said anything, which is very unusual for me (laughs) and he looked up and said "You haven't said anything, what do you think?" And I said Well, I'm from Canada, so... and then doesn't he start speaking French to me, and oh my gosh!

JP Did you answer in French?

EM Yes! Yes, we had this conversation! I knew that he was on the Canada/US Committee, because a friend of mine, a Federal legislator knew him. I said "do you know Grove Brown?" and he said of course, and we're having this great conversation and I said Listen, I'm stopping the flow of the meeting, would you mind if I stayed for a

few minutes at the end and we can connect, and he said sure. So I stayed behind, and he & I were alone in his office. He said “so, tell me about your husband” It was really sweet, and I told him about Greg. And I said to him, I see the picture of your wife, I see the pictured of her with your young children, and he said “So you and I have something in common, right?” So that was the conversation, it was a very intimate conversation, lovely. And I was so sad when I got elected that he was gone (Congressman Jim Oberstar died May 3, 2014 just prior to her election on June 12, 2014) and I wasn’t able to call him or write to him and say Guess what, I got elected. And...because he inspired me. And I’m sad...so I hope he’s looking down from wherever he is and he approves what I did, because he inspired me to make a difference just like he did.

JP Terrific. Is there anything else I should ask?

EM I don’t think so, this has been fun, thank you. It’s like the full circle, you know, grow up in Windsor...

JP What are you doing now? When did you end your term?

EM So I was, the election was June 7, so after losing, and the last cabinet meeting was at the end of June, I spent the summer...I got advice from people, which I tend to like to do. I knew legislators who’d lost their seat, and I knew I faced a difficult road ahead because I cared so much. I loved my job, I loved what I was doing, and I loved the opportunities that it afforded me, so I knew I was going to miss it. So my one friend, who works at the United Nations, she said “get out of Dodge! You should just get away, it’ll be healthy for you to think about other things, and to be somewhere else.” So I went up to my cabin, I have a lovely cabin, so I spent some time there with my family. And then I went to Europe, I took my 92-year old mother on a river cruise, and mom lives in Windsor, and we had a lovely time. So I spent some time traveling, I spent some time with family and friends, and I rested. I thought about other things, and I started to think about what I wanted to do next. Right now I’m working on some projects that are very much related to urban mobility and cycling, that I very much care about. I’ve joined the board of Share the Road, which they asked me to do. I said I would as long as the Executive Director didn’t feel like I was looking over her shoulder-you know, I just wanted to be sure she was comfortable, and she is. So I’m going to continue to do work in cycling and urban mobility and things that I care about. That’s wonderful, I’m very blessed in every way because I get to do things like that. I’m looking for full time work, while at the same time I’m helping the city of Toronto with their Vision Zero work that they’re doing. The national conference is next year in Toronto and I’m on the organizing committee, so I still keep my hand in these issues that I care about, and I hope to have a full time job by the new year.

JP Eleanor McMahon, thank you very much.

EM Thank you!